



Along with his success as a novelist, Willy Vlautin is continuing music with his newest band, the Delines (shown here, with Vlautin at far left).
COURTESY/CONQUEROO

Making it back

Willy Vlautin

There's one venue that sticks out among

Willy Vlautin's reading-and-music tour of Nevada towns, all to promote his latest book, 2018's *Don't Skip Out On Me*. Among the Carson Valley libraries and rural Basque hotels is a haunt many townies know quite well: Corrigan's Bit O'Ireland on Wells Avenue. Not known for hosting shows, Corrigan's is quite in-character for Vlautin and his use of Reno locales in his music and novels.

"I grew up drinking in Corrigan's, and I had a day off on Sunday," Vlautin explained in an interview from his home outside of Scappoose, Oregon, a small town near Portland. "Man, I wasted a lot of years of my life in that place, and since my buddy owns it now I thought it would be really funny, and maybe dangerous and cool."

Born in Reno, Vlautin moved to Portland in the early '90s and eventually started acclaimed rock band Richmond Fontaine. Vlautin's lyrics often alluded to the lives he observed, and his own situation, while living in Reno.

"I wrote a lot of tunes about it, all my homesick Reno songs," Vlautin said. "I moved up to Portland when I was 26 or 27 because I couldn't get anything going in Reno. It was hard to be a weird guy at that time in Reno. My mom was pretty conservative, and it's just hard to be a failed artist in the town you grew up."

He'll be joined at his Nevada shows by RF pedal steel player Paul Brainard. In something that sounds like the "postcard" sections from their classic album *Post to Wire*, Brainard will play behind Vlautin as he reads from the novel. The duo will play music from the album that's also

called *Don't Skip Out On Me*, meant as a soundtrack to the novel.

"For the soundtrack, I wrote it pretty much for Paul to play, so for me this is just fun," Vlautin continued. "Fontaine doesn't play anymore, and I don't see Paul as much as I used to, so it's great that Nevada Humanities can bring both Paul and me there. It'll be nice just to hang out."

Vlautin said the book's title song, and several others featured on RF's official final record, called *You Can't Go Back If There's Nothing To Go Back To*, were developed before the novel started.

"The emotion at the heart of that song is a lot like the novel ended up, but I hadn't really figured out the novel yet," Vlautin said. "A lot of times I have an emotional feel for it, like, say you hear a song that really devastates you, and you try to write a novel that feels like that song."

It's been a big musical year for Vlautin, with this tour as well as treks to Europe with his latest band, the Delines. Writing what he calls "depressing soul ballads," the Delines will be back there for shows this fall to support their new album, *The Imperial*.

He's also working on a new novel, with a subject that was inspired by Oregonian life but that some Renoites these days will relate to.

"The housing in Portland has gone up four times since I've been here, and the minimum wage has only gone up once," Vlautin said. "Portland is not a town for artists anymore. Like the Bay Area, Reno, Seattle ... so many places where it's like that. So I'm trying to kind of write about it, about a working-class family that gets kicked out of their house after 25 years and how they respond to it." □

Willy Vlautin's tour through Nevada includes a show at 5:30 p.m. Sept. 14 at Ceol Irish Pub, 528 S. Virginia St.; and 7 p.m. Sept. 15 at Corrigan's Bit O'Ireland, 1526 S. Wells Ave. Get details on all things Vlautin at www.willyvlautin.com.

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